Celebrating, Supporting, and Uniting LGBTQI+ Older Adults

Belonging and Equity = Meaning and Resilience

by Keith Ashley

Like many organizations, Senior Pride is taking a hard look at how we communicate our values and our profound desire to make sure we serve and welcome all older LGBTQI+ people. We want to strengthen our ties to the LGBTQI+ Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and transgender communities. We believe that resilience is directly related to a sense of belonging – but how do we truly create the experience of belonging for everyone in our community?

Over the course of the next twelve months, Senior Pride will work closely with Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) consultants, Julie Ragland and John-Peter Wilhite, to assess and improve our organizational goals, strategy, and culture as they apply to creating a more inclusive, diverse, equitable and accessible organization.

This work is made possible through a generous grant received from the David and Lura Lovell Foundation and the Community Foundation of Southern Arizona.

John-Peter shares: “I have been doing this work for 30 years and I have had the opportunity to learn from so many individuals who REALLY care about creating spaces where all people feel safe to come together and learn to understand each other more. For me there are two key elements of this work: 1) being self reflective so you can find your role along this journey, and, 2) creating an environment where people are willing to lean in to understanding each other, no matter what, versus only wanting to be understood.”

Julie and John-Peter’s work with Senior Pride will include a survey of the membership, individual interviews with around 30 individuals (staff, volunteers and participants), a review of all organizational policies and procedures, as well as education, exploration, and skills development sessions every other month at the start of Steering Committee meetings.

In reflecting on this project with Senior Pride, Julie notes: “Every group we work with is different, with different identities represented and different organizational

We are richer when all voices are heard...

From Senior Pride Diversity Statement

Article continues on page 2
Belonging and Equity = Meaning and Resilience
(continued)
culture, but there are similarities among all the groups in how people are showing up for this work - the fears, apprehensions, questions, and excitement. […] I think working with Senior Pride is a little bit different … in that it’s a group of people who have historically been marginalized, so in some ways I think people are more willing to understand other marginalized communities, because there’s a sense of understanding what it means to have to work harder to have their voices heard and their needs met.”

Please visit Senior Pride’s Website to read our Diversity Statement:
https://soazseniorpride.org/who-we-are/diversity/

Our new Volunteer Coordinator: Susannah Myerson

Volunteering with Southern Arizona Senior Pride is a great way to connect with other LGBTQI+ folks and help create and sustain a vibrant community for older adults in the Tucson area. And it’s fun! Whether you have two hours a month or two hours a week, we welcome you to join us. You can learn more about volunteer opportunities by visiting www.soazseniorpride.org/volunteer or by contacting Susannah at volunteer@soazseniorpride.org

Susannah has been active as a volunteer with several local non-profit organizations. In her professional life, she works in senior housing finance as part of a specialized lending group within Wells Fargo Bank.
She was the first woman Tucson Firefighter. A Physician Assistant for 18 years, currently serving immigrant asylum seekers. Studied Chinese medicine and massage in Beijing. Oh yes, an MBA and DrPH in public health, both degrees from the University of Arizona. A founder and Executive Director of a non-profit. AND, maker of “gourmet” soaps.

Dr. Deanna Lewis defies expectations. “I thrive on new experiences,” she says. No kidding.

As a faculty member at the University of Arizona’s Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health, she’s developing new courses for the college of public health to include the first stand alone LGBTQ+ course and a course of mindfulness. Lewis is advocating for a course specific to public health for future health care providers. Her focus has always been on inclusion and equity, especially for medically underserved people to include LGBTQ+, non-binary, gender-nonconforming and transgender populations.

“We need a diverse lens…if we don’t understand our implicit bias, we’re never going to be as effective as we could be,” she tells students. She believes “public health = social justice.”

She believes “public health = social justice.”

After receiving her Physician’s Assistant certificate from Stanford University, Deanna returned to Southern Arizona to work in Tubac. She realized the dire need for rural medical services and, in 2002, founded a mobile health clinic and a community health organization, Dequenesh (an Ethiopian derived word meaning “You Are a Wonder.”)

http://www.dequenesh.org

Receiving an MBA from the UA Eller School of Business in 2009, her purpose was to learn how to build a sustainable non-profit. The viability of Dequenesh reflects her determination. In her “leisure time” she loves to craft gourmet soaps and uses funds from sales to provide stipends for C4 (Center 4 Community Campus Connections) Fellows and reinvest back into the LGBTQI+ community.

She urges those interested in packages of botanical soaps (including seven varieties of basil) to visit https://c4center4.com/ or to learn more about Deanna go to http://www.forwardmovingconcepts.com

“I came out at 17 in 1979,” she recalls and experienced both a lot of “incredible” support and “harshness” from intersections of racial and gender bias. Now, at age 59, she/ze identifies as an Afro-Euro, non-binary, cis-gender female. “Gender identity is fluid,” she says.

A member of the LGBTQ Alliance Fund board, Deanna says “my passion lies in how do we insure that every person can optimize quality of life. We underestimate how connected we are.”
With Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation (SAAF) serving as Southern Arizona Senior Pride’s fiscal sponsor, all donations to our organization are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.

By Check:
Payable to our Fiscal Sponsor: SAAF
375 South Euclid Avenue, Tucson, AZ 85719
Write SENIOR PRIDE in the Memo Line

By Telephone:
(520) 547-6119
Specify: Senior Pride

Senior Pride Connects Our Community -- Your Donations Keep Us Strong!
Senior Pride’s cultural events, support groups, Community Cares Program, workshops, website with local resources, Facebook page, YouTube channel and weekly news updates provide a hub for our community.

This work is made possible by supporters like you. Please donate today.

By Check: Payable to our Fiscal Sponsor: SAAF
375 South Euclid Avenue, Tucson, AZ 85719
Write SENIOR PRIDE in the Memo Line

Online: Go to our website
soazseniorpride.org
Click on “Donate”

By Telephone: (520) 547-6119
Specify: Senior Pride

With Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation (SAAF) serving as Southern Arizona Senior Pride’s fiscal sponsor, all donations to our organization are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.